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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Radio Service

OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Wednesday, October 16, 1935

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "WINTER QUARTERS FOR VEGETABLES." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. D. A.

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We human beings differ about the ideal place to spend the winter. You may be a hardy soul who thrives on zero weather and plenty of ice and snow, while your neighbor may prefer a balmy southern climate, or the warm, dry air at a dessert resort.

Fall vegetables differ just as much as human beings about the winter quarters that suit them best. That's a point worth your consideration if you are storing any of the products from your garden. The ideal location for your cabbage won't keep your pumpkins well and happy. And the environment that is just right for turnips won't take care of squash.

The other day I imagined what a garden conversation might be like, if all the fall vegetables could express themselves. It went something like this:

The carrot began by asking her friends how they were enjoying the autumn weather. She said she thought a hint of frost on the air was bracing.

That remark made the squash shiver. "Oh, please don't mention frost. You carrots may enjoy cold weather, but I just haven't the constitution for it."

"Neither have I," said the pumpkin. "I'm hoping to go indoors anytime now -- the sooner the better for my health. If they leave me out here until we've had some of those nights that chill you to the bone, I'll never be the same. The poet who wrote about 'the frost on the pumpkin' was no friend of mine. No member of my family can stand freezing. We need a comfortable, moderately warm place if we're to get through the winter safely."

The sweetpotato nodded, and said: "The same with our family. Personally, I manage to keep my health only if I avoid all jolts, jars, cuts and bruises, and if I take the 'cure' when I first go in in the fall."

"The cure? What's that?" asked the beet.

"Nothing you need to bother about," replied the sweetpotato. "The cure my doctor orders is 10 days in a warm room where the thermometer registers 80 to 85 degrees. That gives me a resistance against winter ailments. Then, I like to retire with the rest of the family to a basket in the cellar near the furnace, or to an upstairs room where the temperature is about 55 degrees. If I can keep warm and dry -- and am in good condition to start -- I'll pull through to spring."

The pumpkins and squash all agreed heartily with the sweetpotato's ideas about spending a happy winter. They said they all felt better for a "cure" before settling down for the winter, then wanted a dry, well-ventilated, frost-proof place. But they said they kept in better health if each one had his separate place on the floor or shelf and didn't come in contact with the others.

Several members of the group were laughing merrily by this time. The hardy parsnip whispered: "Those poor delicate sissies can't stand a fall frost when I am perfectly happy staying out in the frozen ground all winter. I like any cold place."

The salsify and horseradish root also spoke in favor of spending the winter out in the garden. And the cabbage said: "Cold doesn't bother me much either. But I'd rather be indoors. As a matter of fact, when the temperature in the storage cellar is just at the freezing point -- that is, 32 degrees -- I'm happy. If I spend the winter in a place that is too warm or dry, I shrivel and get wrinkles."

The beet remarked: "Pardon me for bringing up an embarrassing subject. But you two fellows better not brag so much about your virtues when everybody knows that no nice home will keep you in its cellar."

"What's that?" said the parsnip angrily.

The beet continued: "To speak plainly, I'm referring to your odor, my dear sir, and also to yours, Cabbage. You two aren't invited to spend the winter in the cellar of any home because your odor soon rises to the upper floors. That's why you stay outside -- in outdoor storage houses or in covered pits."

The onion broke in here with: "Tut, tut, friends. What's this about odor? That's no disgrace. I claim to have a stronger smell than anyone here and I'm accepted in the best society. For my part, I'm happy in any dry, cold, well-ventilated place for the winter, whether it's a cold attic or a cellar. I can stand a slight freeze, too, without coming to harm, as long as no one moves me around while I'm frozen. Just pile me in a basket or barrel or bag until I'm wanted at the dinner table."

The beet said: "I like to be pulled when the soil is dry and have my tops cut off before I go into winter quarters. Then, I vote for a cold moist storage cellar. I'll stay in ventilated barrels or crates, or just in small piles on the earth floor. In general, my preference for a winter home is the same as the carrot, parsnip, and the white potato."

"Yes," said the white potato, "I'll be happy to join you if the temperature doesn't get too cold. But I can't stand being frozen, you know -- in fact 45 or 50 degrees keeps me feeling fit. And I'm very particular about having a dark place to stay in. If the light reaches me, I'm sure to turn green or sprout."

An apple spoke up: "I'll keep company with the potato, for I like a cold, well-ventilated, dark storage cellar, too. But I can't stand freezing."

Well, see what happens when my imagination starts working? Now I'll be serious and review a few storage points. All vegetables won't keep in storage, so I've only mentioned those that would. In general, vegetables that come in from the garden in good condition will last if you give them the right temperature and the right degree of humidity -- or moisture in the air. Some keep best in cool, moist surroundings, such as in a cellar without a furnace. These include the beet, carrot, parsnip, salsify, turnip, potato, and cabbage, also Brussels sprouts and celery. The vegetables that need a drier place are the onion, dry bean, pumpkin, and squash.

If carrots and root crops shrivel in the cellar, the air is too dry. You can increase the humidity by sprinkling the floor with water or covering the vegetables with moist sand. If the vegetables sprout or grow in storage, the air is too warm. Open the window wider and watch the temperature. Be sure to have a thermometer in your storage room.

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